

Basic Detail Report



Title: Lake Wawayanda, Sussex County, New Jersey

Date: 1870

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3e131

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: Lake Wawayanda is situated in Sussex County, New Jersey, just south of the New York-New Jersey border and just west of Greenwood Lake and was, therefore, not far from Cropsey's home, Aladdin. Indeed, the New Britain canvas, painted the year after Aladdin was built, depicts the region in which Cropsey's art and life co-mingled to a greater extent than in any of the other locations in which he lived or spent time. He was most comfortable with the sort of tamed, welcoming, and lush environs that he found there, which blend rolling forested hills, low mountains, rich farmland, lakes, rivers, and streams. (1) The Hudson River area, of course, has similar terrain. Perhaps such surroundings best nurtured the lovingly faithful yet idealizing approach to nature that was characteristic of Cropsey's Hudson River School style. The New Britain scene is typical of his art in this regard; lyrically beautiful in mood, its carefully rendered imagery evokes a state of absolute peace, together with bounty and leisure in a world where nature and humanity are at one. A bit of cleared land and perhaps the home of a farmer amid verdant growth are visible in the middle distance at the right, while children and a dog play in the water in the right foreground and cows, one of the ubiquitous bucolic motifs in landscape painting, ford into the lake in the middle distance at the left. The mirror-like surface of the water and the almost cloudless sky softly glow with the light of the sun, which has just set behind the shoreline coulisse of land forms and foliage at the left, backlit to emphasize the reds, oranges, yellows, and greens of an autumnal palette. Aside

Basic Detail Report

from this latter construct, which is thickly and richly pigmented, the canvas is thinly painted. The atmosphere of tranquility is enhanced by the horizontal Claudian composition that Cropsey has used. It found its way into American landscape painting by the 1820s, somewhat tentatively at first in the work of Thomas Doughty and Alvan Fisher. Cole and especially Durand made it even more popular. Cropsey used it frequently, particularly when he sought idealizing effects, as in the New Britain canvas, where the left to right expansion is contained by the coulisse at the left and the attention-getting repoussoir devices at the right: the beach, dog, sailboat, and children. Such repoussoir imagery is common in Cropsey's work and had, of course, long been a mainstay of landscape painting. Indeed, it is almost obligatory in the horizontal Claudian composition to create a balance between left and right, not to mention near and far. J. M. W. Turner was particularly inventive with such repoussoir devices. Cropsey saw the first posthumous exhibition of Turner's work, selected by John Ruskin, which opened at Marlborough House in 1856, the year Cropsey arrived in London for his second stay abroad. (2) Also pertinent to the Wawayanda scene is the way in which Turner used repoussoir imagery in combination with water in almost all of his designs engraved for his "Rivers of France", which Cropsey probably owned. (3) Cropsey portrayed Lake Wawayanda in a number of works, most of which date to the 1870s. (4) His earliest depiction of the site appears to be an oil signed and dated 1846 (whereabouts unknown) that served as the basis for an engraved vignette that Cropsey designed for "The Home Book of the Picturesque", published in 1852. (5) There are, however, no known drawings related to the New Britain canvas or any entries on the work in Cropsey's journal. (6) Almost nothing is known of the picture's provenance before it came to Vose Gallery of Boston, in 1959; there is no exhibition history before the 1960s. (7) A tantalizing comment on one of Cropsey's depictions of the stream called Wawayanda appears in an 1884 issue of "Manhattan Magazine". "One large and delicious 'Autumn on the Wawayandah'" by Cropsey, the author observes, "was bought by an English collector while on a visit to this country and carried off to England before it had a chance to be seen here." (8) Perhaps the New Britain oil was "carried off" in this manner as well, before it returned to reside at the Museum.

MBW Bibliography: Jasper Francis Cropsey, "Up Among the Clouds," Crayon 2 (August 8, 1855): 79-80; Peter Bermingham, "Jasper F. Cropsey, 1823-1900: A Retrospective View of America's Painter of Autumn", exhib. cat. (College Park, Md.: University of Maryland Art Gallery, 1968); William S. Talbot, "Jasper F. Cropsey, 1823-1900" (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970); William S. Talbot, "Jasper F. Cropsey, 1823-1900," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1972; Kenneth W. Maddox, "An Unprejudiced Eye: The Drawings of Jasper F. Cropsey" (Yonkers: Hudson River Museum, 1979); Carrie Rebora, "Jasper Cropsey Watercolors" (New York: National Academy of Design, 1985). NOTES: 1. Cropsey described the region in a letter (quoted in Motley F. Deakin, ed., "The Home Book of the Picturesque: or, American Scenery, Art, and Literature" [New York: G. P.

Basic Detail Report

Putnam, 1852; reprint, Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars, Facsimilies & Reprints, 1967], p. 114): "The country is mountainous and covered mostly by forests; but the little ridges and valleys that lie between the mountains are cultivated; farmhouses dot them here and there, amid apple orchards and luxuriant meadows brooks wind through the meadows or linter with many a fall down the wooded hill-side, sustaining here and there a mill, and then loosing themselves in some swamp, or spreading out in some placid little lake or pond. All the country, as I passed along, was highly picturesque, possessing to a great extent the wild beauty of the Catskill and White Mountain country, combined with the tame and cultivated Orange county, next to which it lies." I am grateful to Kenneth W. Maddox, Art Historian, Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York (hereafter NCF), for calling this passage to my attention. I am also grateful for his generous assistance with the resources and files at the NCF and for his informative comments on Cropsey's life and career. 2. On Cropsey's responses to Turners in the exhibition, see "Mere Mention," "Home Journal" 3 (January 17, 1857): 1. 3. Stephen J. Zeitz, "Annotated Bibliography of Jasper F. Cropsey's Library," in Mishoe Brennecke, Ella Forshay, and Barabara Finney, "Jasper F. Cropsey: Artist and Architect" (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1987), p. 165. 4. I am indebted to Kenneth Maddox for locating other representations of Lake Wawayanda by Cropsey in the files at NCF. 5. NCF file, no. 695 6. Deakin, ed., "Home Book of the Picturesque", opp. p. 113. The engraving was published again in "A Landscape Book, By American Artists and American Authors" (New York: G. P. Putnam; and London: Sampson Low, 1868), opp. p. 62. 7. NCF file, no. 658. 8. Ibid. 9. William H. Forman, "Jasper F. Cropsey, N. A.," "Manhattan Magazine" 3 (April 1884): 379. Dimensions: 24 x 44 1/8 in. (37 1/2 x 57 3/4 x 6 in.)